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## **BARRIERS TO RECRUITING NATIVE AMERICAN FOSTER HOMES IN URBAN AREAS**

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BARRIERS TO RECRUITING NATIVE AMERICAN  
FOSTER HOMES IN URBAN AREAS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Shirley Mae Begay  
Jennifer Lynn Wilczynski  
June 2018

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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the current practice of and barriers specific to recruiting Native American foster homes in urban areas. The literature review suggested that historical, cultural, and bureaucratic barriers to recruitment existed. The study used a qualitative, exploratory design. The data was obtained from in-depth interviews with 10 individuals whose job it is or has been to recruit Native American foster homes. The participants were employed with either a foster family agency, county child welfare agency, or a supporting organization servicing Los Angeles County and/or the San Francisco Bay Area. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide designed by the researchers. The findings suggest that the recruitment of Native American foster families is hampered by: expense/lack of financial support, Resource Family Approval, understated deficiency and need, Native American recruitment not prioritized, bias and judgement, vulnerability and the value of privacy, distrust of government, lack of cultural awareness, absence of connection to the community, and tribal enrollment of caregiver. The research also identified proactive efforts by individuals and agencies to specifically recruit Native American foster homes. The results from this study have implications for social work practice related to the recruitment and retention of Native American foster homes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the gracious contributions of the 10 interview participants and the many professionals within both the social services field and the Native American community.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my family for their consistent love and encouragement during my pursuit of a higher education. I would also like to dedicate this work to my fiancé, an incredible and supportive man who has shared many late nights of studying and writing with me, and to my friends who have cheered me on throughout this journey. Finally, I would like to dedicate this paper to the innumerable Native children and families who have been affected by the child welfare system, for I am one of those children.

Shirley aka Kippi

I would like to dedicate this paper to my family, for without them, I would not have had the courage to persist, but especially to my mother who made it possible for me to pursue education in the field of social work and supported me through my many challenges and detours. I would also like to dedicate this work to Max, my singularly amazing son, to Craig, an incredible person who has provided me with much needed solace and hope, and to all of the friends who have been by my side throughout this journey. I cannot say how truly grateful I am for their patience and encouragement.

Jen

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

Native Americans, also known as American Indians/Alaskan Natives (AI/AN), and less commonly, Indians, make up roughly 1% of the United States' population, yet Indian youth, ages 0-18 years, comprise 2% of all youth placed in out-of-home care (Children's Bureau, 2016). Out-of-home care is utilized when a safety risk exists for children within their own homes. Care is typically provided in the homes of their relatives or in the homes of strangers within their community who have been certified as foster care providers. Research has shown that AI/AN children are placed in out-of-home care three times more frequently than Caucasian children (Hill, 2007). In 2015, over 10,000 Native American children were in out-of-home care placements across the country (Children's Bureau, 2016). The disproportion is similar in urban areas. In July of 2017, the number of Native American youth in foster care in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area mirrored that data across the country; Native American children were in care at double the rate of their population representation (Webster et al., 2017).

The over-representation of AI/AN children in the public child welfare system is not a new phenomenon. The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed in 1978 to address disproportionate rates of AI/AN children taken from their families, communities, and cultures, and adopted to non-Native families.

This law requires the prioritization of connections between children and their Native American identities by public child welfare workers when considering out-of-home placement. The guidelines were written with the intention of helping Native American children who must be in foster care maintain as much of a connection with their families, culture, and heritage as possible. Placement preference goes to extended family first, then to foster homes certified by the child's tribe. If there are no homes approved by the tribe, then preference goes to Native American foster homes approved by an outside agency. The next placement preference is an institution approved by the tribe. Only after all of these options have been exhausted, the child will be placed in a non-Native foster home (Haralambie, 2009).

While preference goes to family, only a small fraction of AI/AN children end up in the homes of their relatives. In the San Francisco Bay Area, of all AI/AN children in foster care placements, less than one-third were placed with relatives (Webster et al., 2017). Similarly, in Los Angeles County, less than half of the Native American children in care reside with extended family (Webster et al., 2017). Data on the number of Native American foster homes in urban regions of California, such as Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, are not widely available. Based on interviews recently conducted with professionals in the field, there are a mere 14 Native American out-of-home care placement options throughout the counties in the metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area (personal communication, November 4, 2016). The number of Native American

out-of-home care placement options in Los Angeles County are much lower. A recent news article posted on The Chronicle of Social Change website, lists one Indian foster home in all of Los Angeles County (Heimpel, 2016). Placing Native American children with Native American families and fostering their connection to their heritage is a difficult task if the homes intended to do so are unavailable. Not only is there a disproportionately high number of Native American children in out-of-home care, but there also is a lack of Native American foster homes available, making the goals of the ICWA impossible to uphold.

### Purpose of the Study

This study explores the barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes in urban areas, specifically in the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles County and the nine counties that make up the San Francisco Bay Area. These two areas will be focused on in particular due to their large Native American population and the commonality of being popular urban relocation sites in California during the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 (Fixico, 2000).

Many child welfare professionals are aware of the lack of homes to meet placement preferences of the ICWA, and more importantly, the needs of AI/AN youth. The National Indian Child Welfare Association recently referred to this issue as a hot topic at their annual conference in 2017. This problem has also gained attention recently in the Southern California area with a workgroup of professionals who meet quarterly to discuss and work through issues on Indian child welfare, specifically on issues that affect their collaborative efforts.

Professionals from this workgroup agree that there are not enough Native American out-of-home care placement options in the urban areas they serve and that there is not much understanding of why this is the case (personal communication, October 2, 2017). Searches for related studies turned up extremely limited results on the lack of Native American foster homes. With a federal policy in place to ensure that all reasonable efforts are made to maintain AI/AN children with families who share their culture, a surprisingly limited amount of research or best practice models for recruiting these homes exists. For these reasons, it is important that this topic be explored at greater lengths.

#### Significance of the Study for Social Work

Findings from research into the lack of Native American foster homes have the potential to influence the practice of social workers in the public child welfare system by revealing common barriers to recruitment. This research will inform social service organizations and give them an opportunity to modify their efforts in recruiting Native American foster care providers, and thus improve upon the ability of the child welfare system to meet the basic needs of Native American children required to be in out-of-home care placements. Beyond insight and informing best practice, if barriers relating to child welfare policy are discovered, research findings could potentially influence federal, state, and organizational changes which will, in turn, affect the recruitment of Native American homes. This research also has the potential to lay the foundation for additional and more in-depth studies in this area and in related topics. This study intends to answer

the question: What are the barriers to recruiting Native American homes in urban areas?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This section will review historical context related to the ICWA, availability of ICWA preferred placements, foster care recruitment, and gaps in research that support the need for this study.

#### Impact of Policies Before the Indian Child Welfare Act

Extensive literature and oral history lay out centuries of treaties, laws, and policies intended to colonize, exterminate, and assimilate Native American people. Over more recent centuries, Native American families, and more specifically the children, were the primary target of these attempts. During what is referred to as the assimilation era, Native American children were detained by the public child welfare system and, with no intention of being returned to their families, were sent to boarding schools at high rates. Thousands of displaced children were forced to grow up far from their reservation lands and without connections to their families or culture (Halverson, Puig, & Byers, 2002). The boarding school era lasted for the better part of seventy years, from the 1880s through the 1950s (Halverson, Puig & Byers, 2002). In the 1950s, two key events occurred that further contributed to the breakdown of the Native American family and thereby increased the threat of the Native American communities losing their children.



The first event was the passing of the Indian Relocation Act in 1956. The act relocated thousands of Native American people from the reservation lands to the urban areas of the country, including the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area (Fixico, 2000). There were large numbers of Native American people who migrated from reservation lands to urban areas throughout the United States (Carter, 2011). The Bureau of Indian Affairs offered Native American people the opportunity to relocate in exchange for vocational training and living stipends. The program may have appeared to be in the best interest of the Native American people, however, the ulterior motive was to further assimilate Indian people into mainstream society (Laukaitis, 2005). Between the 1950s and 1970s, over one hundred thousand Native American people participated in the relocation program (Fixico, 2000). By the 1990s, more than twice as many Native Americans lived in urban areas as on the reservation lands (Halverson et al., 2002). Many urban Indian communities developed as a result of this relocation. In California, large communities formed and still exist in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles County and the nine counties comprising the San Francisco Bay Area (Fixico, 2000). Many of the people from these communities suffered and faced significant challenges in adjusting to their new surroundings (Aragon, 2006). The effects were visible in many areas of their lives, including the ability to care for their children.

The second key event that contributed to the loss of Native American children was the era of adoption. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the Child

Welfare League established a collaborative agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to place Native American children in out-of-home care with families who did not share their culture (Halverson, 2002). During this time, a disproportionate number of Indian children were removed resulting in 25% to 35% of the total population being placed in foster care or adopted out and mostly with non-Native families (Halverson et al., 2002). According to one report, in 16 states in the year 1969, 85% of AI/AN children in out-of-home placements resided in homes with people who knew nothing of their culture (Plantz, Hubbel, Barrett & Dobrec, 1989). Children were estranged not only from their relatives and communities but from their culture and their identities as well.

### The Indian Child Welfare Act

By the 1970s, Native American tribes and advocates demanded that the federal government address the disproportionate number of Native American children in the child welfare system. Rates of placement of Native American children in foster homes or up for adoption were between five and 19 times greater than those of non-Native children (MacEachron, Gustasson, Cross & Lewis, 1996). Between 1974 and 1978, Congress heard testimonies on the negative impact the removal of Native American children had on family structure and on the survival of Native American people and their culture (MacEachron et al., 1996). The ICWA was implemented in the late 1970s to confront the disregard for the culture of Indian children and what the loss of their heritage meant to their identities (Limb & Perry, 2003). The ICWA implemented a

hierarchy of placement options designed to maintain the connection of youth to their culture and to minimize the trauma they endured when removed from their homes (Limb & Perry, 2003). According to the guidelines of the ICWA, there is an order of preference for placement intended to maintain the child's connection to their culture should they be removed from their homes and require alternative care. Placement preferences are as follows: extended relatives, a home certified through the child's tribal authorities, an Indian home approved by either a foster family agency (FFA) or county officials, or an organization authorized by the tribe or managed by Native Americans (Haralambie, 2009). If none of these placements are available, the child may be placed in the most appropriate non-Native foster home available in the county's child welfare system.

Since the passing of this law, the rates at which Native American children have been removed from their homes have declined (Fineday, 2015). However, AI/AN youth are still over-represented in the child welfare system and agencies continue to struggle to find out-of-home placements in keeping with the ICWA placement preference goal of maintaining the children's connection with their community and culture. In 1986, eight years after the passing of the ICWA, one study of Indian children in out-of-home care from four states showed that only 51% of children were placed with Native American families (MacEachron, 1996). While this is an improvement from the rates in the 1960s and 1970s, still, close to half of all Native American children were placed in non-Native homes.

## Foster Care Recruitment

One of the prerequisites of being able to apply the ICWA as intended is the availability of foster families to support the efforts. With so many children entering the child welfare system every year, recruiting and retaining enough foster homes for children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds has been an ongoing challenge.

A cross-cultural analysis revealed three main challenges in recruitment and retention of foster families in general: motive and ability to provide care for children in the foster system, philanthropy, and standards for kinship/unrelated care (Colton, Roberts, & Williams, 2006). Motivation appears to be the first-line predictor of a family's likelihood to foster. Foster families often possess either a strong sense of civic responsibility, a deep and personal interest in having a child to love and care for, or a desire for self-glorification (Colton, Roberts & Williams, 2006). A family's ability to foster children refers to the family having or being able to acquire the skills needed to foster. Licensing standards that lack clear definitions of parenting requirements and that require applicants to meet very specific housing and income requirements, contribute to the lack of licensed foster families (Colton et al., 2006). The increasingly complex emotional and developmental needs of youth entering foster care and the absence of adequate training for adults taking on the role of parent to support these children is also a concern (Colton et al., 2006).

The debate between seeing foster parents as professionals, paying them professional wages and maintaining a motivating factor of altruism rather than income is a real issue and makes recruitment and retention difficult (Colton et al., 2006). In many states and even in other countries, the amount of funds one receives in compensation of providing foster care services is insufficient to cover the cost of care for the child (Colton et al., 2006). Similarly, the study found that the availability of appropriate training is a major factor in the decision to foster both related and unrelated youth and the potential caregivers' ability to do so (Colton et al., 2006). On the one hand, child welfare systems expect foster parents to function as pseudo-professionals who are licensed and meet minimum standards. Yet, on the other hand, foster parents are not afforded a professional level of training or pay.

Additional research reveals four major issues in recruiting foster care providers: underutilization of recruitment methods, poor public perception, cumbersome recruitment methods, and the inability to measure recruitment success (Rehnquist, 2002). Focus group data from this research supports findings in the cross-cultural analysis that confirm a more extensive list of needs of the children entering the child welfare system today as opposed to the needs of those children who experienced the foster system in the past (Rehnquist, 2002). The public child welfare system's inability to adapt their recruitment strategies to the demands of the foster care participants has been noted by both child welfare practitioners and foster parents (Rehnquist, 2002). One recruitment

strategy that is underutilized is the use of current foster parents to recruit additional foster parents (Rehnquist, 2002). Acknowledging the challenges of providing for any child in out-of-home care, the best resource that the state could give a new foster parent would be other foster parents – parents who have experience with caring for Native American children, are familiar with their unique needs, and are well-versed in the inner workings of the system responsible for providing this care to the nation’s most vulnerable population. Ultimately, the research indicates a failure of the states and individual counties to adapt and expand recruitment, to address the negative public perception, and to improve society’s understanding of the child welfare system (Rehnquist, 2002).

#### Barriers to Recruiting Native American Foster Homes

Studies that focus exclusively on barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes do not seem to exist. There are, however, a few studies that look at barriers from the foster care providers’ perspectives.

A qualitative study that examined the opinions of seven Native American foster parents in urban communities regarding their experiences with fostering revealed four main themes: disappointment working as a provider within the system, the system’s lack of understanding of the role culture plays in parenting, conflicting views on how family, extended family, and other relations are defined, and the absence of acknowledgement of historical pain related to the disruption of the Indian family over the past several centuries (Halverson et al., 2002). The foster parents in this study all reported a lack of support from child welfare staff

and a lack of knowledge or availability of culturally relevant services (Halverson et al., 2002). They also spoke of negative experiences with the child welfare system personally or by someone they knew. There is a historic abuse by and mistrust of the child welfare system that the respondents believed must be addressed before Native American people can begin to feel comfortable working with staff within the system (Halverson et al., 2002). According to the study, the lack of attention to culture and tradition and the unique recruitment needs of the Native American community continue to be a determining factor in the availability of foster homes equipped to meet the intent of the ICWA. Members of the AI/AN communities have had ongoing experiences with the child welfare system that have been both discouraging and detrimental to their families and culture leading to additional challenges for the child welfare system to recruit and retain homes within these specific communities (Halverson et al., 2002). In addition, many Native Americans have migrated, or been placed, off-reservation within urban settings, separated from their culture and communities and more difficult to reach through recruitment efforts (Halverson et al., 2002). It is reasonable to expect Native American communities to feel confused and discouraged when their “solutions to child protection are not acknowledged or accepted” (Morrison, Fox, Cross & Paul, 2010).

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A comprehensive understanding of systems theory will guide this research. Systems theory explains that elements of a situation, including the

people involved and the historical context will interact and influence each other (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, Jr., 2009). Every component participates and plays a part in the creation of the whole and one part cannot be fully understood without first examining the others acting upon it or in the near vicinity. In this research, the barriers which exist for the recruitment of Native American foster homes in urban areas will be complicated by history, culture, bureaucracy, and the people involved. Although systems theory can help to explain relationships, it may not be useful in the application of practice (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney & Strom-Gottfried, 2013). Each suggestion will require a more in-depth investigation into why the child welfare system continues on as it does and how the needs of the Native American children can be better met following the recognition of these obstacles.

Another theory that will lead this research is implementation theory coupled with a cultural competence lens. Implementation theory examines the delivery of program services and determines what is required to translate services into desired outcomes (Weiss, 1998). The theory is responsible for directing the introduction and adaptation of interventions and encouraging the endurance of effective interventions (Mullen, Bledsoe & Bellamy, 2008). Other studies reviewing the barriers to recruiting foster care providers have also used a framework of implementation theory, yet none have taken an approach led by cultural competence to review the unique barriers and needs of Indian communities. Applying a cultural lens to the implementation theory will permit the



study to consider relevant cultural aspects that may impact the challenges of recruiting Native American foster homes within urban areas. With the ICWA, there appears to be a disconnection between the goals of placements and the availability of homes to meet those goals.

With systems theory and implementation theory with a cultural competence lens guiding the research, this study aims to develop a better understanding of the current practice of and barriers specific to recruiting Native American foster homes.

### Summary

There are historic factors that contribute to the excessive number of Native American children in the child welfare system and the subsequent need for appropriate placements. In urban areas, there is a pervasive lack of Native American foster homes to comply with the ICWA and to meet the needs of Indian children. There is limited research to explain the barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes in urban areas. This study will attempt to identify the barriers and offer solutions to improve recruitment efforts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter of the paper details the research methods used to carry out this study. In particular, this section describes the study design, sampling method, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

#### Study Design

This study examined the barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes in urban areas. While a handful of research studies looked at the challenges of recruiting foster homes in general, there is limited awareness and minimal research done on barriers unique to recruiting Native American foster care providers. A qualitative design was chosen due to the very limited research literature on the topic. This design allowed for exploration of the problem, which has been overlooked in other studies. It is imperative to investigate suspected barriers in order to address them, to improve recruitment efforts, and to increase the number of Indian foster homes in urban areas.

The researchers used a qualitative, semi-structured interview design guide and interviewed 10 individuals whose job it is or has been to recruit Native American foster homes. The participants were employed with either a foster family agency, county child welfare agency, or a supporting organization. A

condition required for sampling was that the study participant be employed with an agency which participates in recruitment efforts, or should be participating in recruitment efforts, in either Los Angeles County or the San Francisco Bay Area and whose current or past job description included recruiting Native American foster homes. There were no other set criteria for participation.

The researchers scheduled either face-to-face or telephone interviews with participants. At the time of the interview, participants provided, in either written or verbal form, informed consent to participate. The interviews included approximately 20 questions designed to gather information on knowledge of Native American communities, current recruitment practices, barriers to recruitment, reasons Native American families have been denied for foster home certification, and ideas for improving recruitment efforts. The results of these interviews revealed themes in barriers to recruiting Native American homes which may be explored further in future research. It was predicted that themes in barriers would include historical, cultural, and bureaucratic factors.

While qualitative studies have many strengths when exploring new or uncharted topics, there were limitations in using the method with this study. First, qualitative research data were difficult and time-consuming to analyze. Second, the quality of the data collected was dependent upon the skill of the researchers and could be influenced by personal bias. Lastly, the presence or absence of a researcher in a face-to-face interview may have had an impact on the responses of the participants. Unique to this study, confidence in the researchers' ability to

maintain both confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants may have been an issue. Participants may have been hesitant to reveal internal barriers to recruitment efforts out of fear of repercussions.

### Sampling

The best sources to gain insight into the barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes are the individuals and agencies charged with recruiting them. There are two types of entities who employ staff that recruit Indian foster homes; foster family agencies (FFA) and county child welfare agencies. For this study, a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, both methods of non-probability sampling, was used. One of the authors of this paper, Shirley Begay, is Native American and has both personal and professional connections to the Native American communities in both Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area. The researchers used her connections to identify prospective participants.

Through personal connections, researcher Shirley Begay scheduled interviews with an initial pool of three participants. In addition to the sample obtained through personal connections, the researchers utilized public information to contact staff at agencies who met the recruitment criteria. The researchers made contact with three staff members of county child welfare agencies in both areas willing to participate in this study. From these six initial interviews, the researchers were referred to potential participants from FFAs,

county child welfare agencies, and partnering agencies. An additional four interviews were scheduled from these referrals.

### Data Collection and Instruments

A semi-structured interview approach was utilized to collect data for this research study. The researchers conducted nine separate interviews with 10 participants; two staff of a key agency preferred to be interviewed together. Eight of the 10 interviews were conducted face-to-face and two were conducted over the phone. Names of participants and agencies were kept confidential. The interviews were recorded on a digital device for transcription by a paid transcriptionist. The first set of questions collected demographic information on all participants, including age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and duration of employment in their current position. The interview portion also included questions intended to explore each participant's knowledge of Native American communities, current recruitment practices, barriers to recruitment, reasons Native American families have been denied for foster home certification, and ideas for improving recruitment efforts. Questions were open-ended in nature and the researchers used follow-up questions to clarify answers or to gain additional information. The same questions were asked of each participant in roughly the same order, although some answers to questions towards the end of the survey had been elicited from responses to questions at the beginning. The final question asked participants to provide any other information they believed

would be beneficial to the study. Interviews were between 20 minutes and two hours in length. The interview questions are included in Appendix B.

### Procedures

Due to this being a qualitative research study, data was collected through the interviewing of knowledgeable individuals. Participants were encouraged to choose the location for the interview in order to increase their comfort level and aid in the collection of data. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and via telephone conversations and were digitally recorded. At the interview, participants were given an informed consent to sign (Appendix A). A copy was made available to each participant for their records. For the participants interviewed over the phone, the informed consent document was e-mailed to them ahead of time and verbal agreement to participate was documented before the interview began. The informed consent explained the purpose of the study, confidentiality, voluntary participation, ability to withdraw from study, notification that the interview will be recorded, and plan to destroy all confidential information upon completion of the research paper. The individuals chosen for interview were staff from FFAs, county child welfare agencies, and agencies who support and contribute to recruitment efforts of Native American foster home providers in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area. The interviews were conducted in February 2018, transcribed within two weeks of collection, and analyzed by the beginning of April 2018.

### Protection of Human Subjects

The information provided has the potential to be considered sensitive. The responses elicited by the questions may present either the staff member or the agency of the staff member unfavorably. The confidentiality of those interviewed was guaranteed by the absence of identifying information on any paperwork throughout the collection of data and the coding of data in the analysis process. The notes and other paperwork were kept until the completion of the research project. At that time, all paper records were shredded, and electronic records deleted. The Letter of Informed Consent, including a confidentiality statement promising as much, was provided to each potential interview participant prior to the start of the interview either in-person or via electronic mail. A mark on the signature line, along with the interview date, allowed the participant to indicate an understanding of any risks and make available their information for use in the paper. For telephone interviews, the interviewer documented verbal consent of the participant.

### Data Analysis

This study employed qualitative data analysis techniques. Upon the conclusion of each interview, the digital recording was transcribed verbatim to allow efficient access to the data collected. Notes taken regarding the participant's disposition or non-verbal responses given by the participants during the interviews were recorded on a blank interview guide. The participants were differentiated by identification numbers 1-10. The type of agency was coded

using F, C, or S for FFA, county, or support agency respectively. The service area of the agency was identified as either LA for Los Angeles County or SF for the San Francisco Bay Area. The transcripts were read and coded by each researcher individually at first. Responses to each question were compared and contrasted by each researcher to discover themes within the data. The researchers paid close attention to what was said by each interview participant as well as the context and the implications of what was shared. Also kept in mind throughout the analyses was the primary motive behind the research; what professionals in the field perceive as barriers to the recruitment of Native American foster homes in urban areas. The two researchers then came together and compared the themes they had identified separately. Both researchers identified similar themes and discussed the dimensions and qualities of these themes in analysis meetings.

In order to improve the study's integrity, the researchers triangulated the data from different participants, agencies, and geographic areas. The researchers used these different perspectives to expand upon and thoroughly develop each of the themes.

### Summary

This study used a qualitative research design and methods, including a 20-question interview guide developed by the researchers. Using personal connections and both non-probability convenience and snowball sampling, 10 participants who participated in the recruitment of Native American foster homes



either presently or in the past were drafted from agencies in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area. The data were explored using a thematic analysis technique. The study was designed to help the researchers gain a better understanding of what barriers are encountered in the recruitment of Native American foster homes in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Through convenience and snowball sampling, the researchers were able to interview a total of 10 individuals from eight agencies. All participants were interviewed in February 2018. All 10 individuals were employed at an agency that is or has been responsible for the recruitment of Native American foster homes.

Barriers were identified and categorized into 10 themes including: expense/lack of financial support, Resource Family Approval, understated deficiency and need, Native American recruitment not prioritized, bias and judgement, vulnerability and the value of privacy, distrust of government, lack of cultural awareness, absence of connection to the community, and tribal enrollment of caregiver. In this chapter, the demographics of the research participants and the identified themes are detailed.

#### Demographics

The ages of those interviewed ranged from the late twenties to upper seventies. Six of the participants identified as Native American or belonging to a Native American tribe, two participants identified as multi-ethnic including Native American, one identified as multi-ethnic (not Native American), and one identified as Caucasian. One of the 10 participants also identified as Hispanic. All interview participants graduated high school, and seventy percent of those interviewed had

earned graduate level degrees, the majority of which were in social work. Half of the interview participants worked in agencies which provided services for the San Francisco Bay Area, four interview participants worked for agencies which serviced the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles County, and one interview participant's service area included both the San Francisco Bay Area and the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles County. Half of the participants were employed in FFAs, forty percent were employed in county child welfare agencies, and one participant was employed at a supporting agency for social services.

Of the eight agencies represented, staff from five of them reported that they were currently engaging in activities to recruit Native American foster homes. For one of these five agencies, participation involved supporting recruitment efforts in various capacities but did not include direct recruitment. One agency was not currently participating in recruitment efforts but had recruited in the past; it is not currently within their scope to recruit foster homes. The other two agencies are in the process of establishing recruitment practices. Of the 10 interview participants, eighty percent of them are employed at an agency with the responsibility to recruit Native American foster homes. Five of the agencies are actively recruiting, but only twenty percent of the participants complete this task as part of their job description. Half of the interview participants employed within agencies currently recruiting, reported that while it is not part of their job duties, they participate in recruitment efforts as volunteers on their personal time.

The participants who have been involved or are currently involved in recruitment reported setting up informational booths at powwows as one of their primary recruitment efforts. Participants from three different agencies reported collaborating with other agencies in the hosting of events designed to recruit Native foster homes. Three agencies reported holding information sessions about the need for Native American foster homes in the community. Two agencies reported participating in a Public Service Announcement for recruitment that was created through a collaboration between Native and non-Native agencies. Two agencies reported handing out materials and flyers to the general public which were designed to inform and recruit Native American foster homes. Two agencies reported letting interested families come to them. One agency reported reaching out specifically to other Native American agencies to get the word out about recruitment. One agency reported collaborating with tribes to send out recruitment materials to their tribal members in the service area. One agency reported that they follow-up via telephone call and email with individuals who expressed interest in fostering at powwows. Of all of these activities, setting up an information booth at powwows was the most consistent and ongoing effort reported by all of the interview participants. All of the other activities were said to be done sporadically or were a one-time occurrence.

#### Expense/Lack of Financial Support

Many of the participants identified expense for families as a barrier to recruitment. Participant 3 was quick to say that the families who are interested in

having their home licensed to provide foster care may find the expenses overwhelming. Gates, immunizations for family pets, and smoke detectors are all upfront costs that the families have to be able to afford in order to achieve licensing. Time off from work for training requirements, home and vehicle inspections and fingerprinting impacts the expense of taking on the responsibility for foster children. Medical expenses caused by lapses in state health insurance coverage also have the potential to create financial strain for the foster care providers. Applications for medical coverage have to be submitted for each of the children in foster care and updated regularly. Oftentimes, coverage is dropped due to lags in paperwork submissions and foster families are forced to pay for the doctor visit(s) out of their personal accounts. Participant 7 identified that there are currently not enough resources and people to support foster care providers in transporting Native American children far distances for visitation. When asked about the reasons there are so few Native American foster homes in urban areas, Participant 6 brought attention again to the reality of expenses required to add a child into a family which “includ[e] time off work to transition the child, [and] after school programs if [the] child can’t go directly home after school.” Eight of the 10 participants stated that income requirements for potential foster care providers are too high for most individuals and families interested in taking on that responsibility.

In addition to the expense for potential foster care providers, several participants noted a definitive lack of financial support within their agencies to

recruit Native American foster homes. Participant 1 shared that the accreditation fees for becoming and remaining a licensed foster family agency were too high and the foster family agency in which this participant was employed was unable to maintain their licensing due to an inability to pay these fees. Participant 3 similarly stated that “the funding’s not there right now” and that there is a strong need “to have the resources to be able to support the recruiters” within the Native American communities. Recruitment requires funding to not only staff employees dedicated to recruitment but also to host recruitment events. Recruiters must have sufficient funds and time available to devote to the task in order to be effective. Half of the participants reported that their agency was unable to devote a paid position to recruitment alone. A question that Participant 3 asked towards the end of the survey was “How can something grow, when it’s not being fed?”

Participants suggest that the expenses on both agency and potential foster care providers are great. These deficiencies exist in both FFAs and county child welfare agencies in regard to the recruitment of Native American foster homes, but sufficient funding to support the correction of these deficiencies has been denied or the need has been disregarded.

### Resource Family Approval

Policy related to the Resource Family Approval (RFA) was identified as one of the main issues that impacted recruitment in general but also very specifically within the Native American community. The RFA is responsible for approving a standard quality of living situation for all children entering foster care.

Above all policy issues, the space requirements for foster family homes are the most challenging. Participant 1 said,

“... it’s hard. Lots of Indians don’t have space. That’s an issue. The system says you have to have so much space. Well, Indians sleep on the couch. They sleep on the floor. They’ll sleep wherever you can sleep, just as long as you’re with family.”

Participant 8 also referenced the cultural norm of sleeping wherever space was found as a disqualifying factor. Participants 5, 6, 9 and 10 also recognized that potential Native American foster families have been turned away because their home was too small, or the home had already reached maximum capacity.

Criminal background checks required through this process were the second most mentioned barrier related to RFA. Participant 3 mentioned the reality of having multiple families sharing a single home and the complications that may arise from requiring background checks from all members of the household.

Transportation was noted as a potential issue as well - whether the vehicle needed repairs as Participant 4 recalled, or whether a vehicle was on hand, as was brought to the researchers’ attention by Participant 10.

Other issues that surfaced during home inspections had to do with infestation, structural integrity, and devices designed for safety precaution, Participant 3 explained. Participant 4 recalled instances where families were

denied due to minor repairs required on their home that could not be afforded at the time of the inspection.

### Understated Deficiency and Need

Participants identified two misconceptions as barriers to recruitment; there are not many Native American children in foster care and similarly, there is a minimal need for Native American homes. Furthermore, it was suggested that the lack of awareness is at both the agency and the community level.

Participant 3 spoke in general of the lack of awareness of the deficiency and need for Native American foster homes by remarking: "... they say that it's only a small percentage of children [in foster care], but it's a huge percent within our families." The number of Native American children in out-of-home care is small yet it is disproportionate compared to the representation in the general population. Concerned about getting the information out to the local Native American community as well, Participant 3 stated, "There has to be an awareness." Participant 4 worried "...that maybe not everybody knows how dire the situation is..." Participant 5 suggested that attention needs to be paid to the matter so that it can be determined whether or not "... it's a real need in our county."

Participant 7 was relatively new to the recruitment of Native American foster homes and admitted that it was only through meeting with the ICWA Department of Social Services that an awareness of the need was gained. Participant 7 shared with the researchers the fact that "... there's more Native



American children in foster care than there are Native American foster parents” and that it was “mind blowing” to be informed of the statistics.

The lack of an education and understanding around the ICWA also contributes to the lack of awareness of the disparity and need. Participant 4 shared personal frustration with the lack of a basic understanding of “... why it’s important for [a Native child] to be raised in a Native home.” Participant 4 deduced that breaking this barrier to Native American foster home recruitment comes down to training “anyone who’s working with foster parents or foster children or the families.” Further, training must lead to them “understanding ICWA, understanding the tribal communities [and] understanding the importance and differences of a Native child being raised in a Native home.” Participants seem to agree that the lack of community and agency awareness of both the number of Native American children in out-of-home care and the need for and importance of Native American foster homes creates a barrier in recruitment efforts.

#### Native American Recruitment Not Prioritized

The majority of participants interviewed noted that recruitment of Native American homes is not often a priority for all agencies who could or should participate in recruitment efforts. Reviewing the data collected, half of the agencies currently engaging in efforts to recruit, recruited families without specifically targeting any particular race or ethnicity while the other half recognized the urgency of recruiting Native American foster families in particular

and made concentrated efforts to do so. Half of the participants reported that they were not employed in roles that included recruitment of Native American homes as part of their responsibilities, yet they did so anyway. Participant 3 shared that “a group of us got together, and said, okay nothing’s happening. We really need to get in there and make a difference.” Of the five who did have some responsibility to recruit as part of their job, only two of them reported being actively engaged in activities aimed at the recruitment of Native American foster homes. Participant 5 agreed, “it’s an untapped area that we should be paying more attention to.”

### Bias and Judgment

Another barrier identified in recruiting Native American foster homes is the perceived or actual bias and judgment placed on the families applying. Participant 3 noted the challenge of having someone without cultural awareness and sensitivity evaluate a Native American home: “They walk in and you’re bein’ judged, ..., that’s what they’re there for. They’re judgin’ your house.” Participant 8 added that judgment can lead to more trauma for these families.

“The paternalistic society has made [the Native American] community feel that they are less-than. [Native Americans] have been marginalized in ways that [government] can do to no one else. ... It takes a long time to get past that if you know the history.”

Participant 4 explained that “oftentimes, [social workers and administrators] believe a [Native] child is better cared for in sort of the “picket

fenced, two-story, four-bedroom home... kind-of-style of family.” Participant 4 continued, “Some workers don’t wanna go to the reservation or are scared to.”

Also recognized by Participant 10 are the stereotypes:

“...that [Native Americans are] alcoholics. They gamble or things like that.

In most cases, agencies will just say, “Okay, this person’s an alcoholic.

They drink too much. Let’s not certify them. It’s an everyday thing. There’s a lot of people that drink, but it doesn’t affect their daily lives. That’s one of the barriers. It’s prejudgment.”

Upon being asked about barriers specific to Native Americans wanting to become foster care providers, Participant 8 brought bias and judgment to the researchers’ attention as well: “I think [Native American families are] scrutinized more. I think, again, it goes back to the judgment.”

### Vulnerability and the Value of Privacy

The vulnerability Native Americans are forced to open themselves up to and the intrusive nature of home assessments and evaluations were also revealed as barriers to the recruitment of Native American foster homes by many interview participants. Participant 2 recognized this as a possible reason that there are so few Native American foster homes in urban area as getting through the approval process “is pretty dark.” Elaborating, Participant 2 said, “... you’re getting into their business basically, with background checks and home visits and we have a psycho-social assessment that folks have to undergo, and it can be, it can feel pretty intrusive.” Participant 2 continued on to explain that although this

process is the same for any applicant, and all applicants are asked to share their life history and details concerning their childhood, "... Native American people really don't want to talk about [it] especially to somebody who's not part of their culture." Regarding the action of opening up one's home to inspection, Participant 3 spoke of similar feelings:

"... it's a distrust of an agency coming in. I think that's why it's so important to have, from within, because having somebody that doesn't understand, it is hard having people going through everything in your home. It shouldn't be like that, and then the questions that they ask ... are invasive."

Participant 6 also recognized that "some families prefer not to interact or deal with so many people coming into their homes." Participant 7 acknowledged that "... a lot of people have difficulty with being vulnerable" and connected that with one's history and identified it as a barrier to recruiting Native American foster homes. Participant 10 indicated that sometimes the fear of disclosing criminal records in a potential applicant's history may be enough to prevent them from going through the application process. Participant 8 mentioned the embarrassment a Native American person might feel when asked to share private information. Whether they have been divorced, are two-spirit, or have "... a criminal waiver and [are] ashamed to bring it forward," those things may prevent a Native family from going through the process. In addition to shame and embarrassment, Participant 8 identified the fear of rejection as a reason a family may not come forward.

## Distrust of Government

Nine of the 10 participants reported lack of trust or distrust in government and government agencies by the Native American community as a barrier to recruitment. Participants related this distrust to past negative experiences with government agencies and historical trauma experienced by generations of Native Americans.

Participant 3 explained that, “[people have] come across some social workers that have done more harm than good. How do you overcome that, when you’re talkin’ to a family?” The participant went on to say that word spreads in the community and that other families have “heard stories” and are “not sure what [the government’s] motives are.” This distrust makes building relationships between social services and the Native American community challenging.

In regard to historical trauma, Participant 4 remarked that “the government has done a lot of screwed up things” and Participant 1 said that Native Americans carry that with them. Participant 2, on speaking of barriers to recruitment, said, “Getting your foot in the door was pretty hard because you know, it’s the government. That we’re not to be trusted.” When asked about the challenges encountered when recruiting Native American foster homes, Participant 10 mentioned how crucial it is to gain the trust of the Native American families before a relationship can be established. Further explaining this, Participant 8 mentioned the importance of understanding “historical trauma and the fact that it is epigenetic.” Epigenetic refers to the idea that trauma

experienced by earlier generations, such as war and forced relocation, can be seen in the future generations in a multitude of ways.

### Lack of Cultural Awareness

Many interview participants noted that Native American history and culture is not well understood by the general community. Participant 1 remembered being educated in the elementary school system and remarked "... they really don't teach Indian history at all." The participant went on to note that lack of education on history increases the likelihood of non-Natives misunderstanding Native American traditions. Participant 8 shared an experience of an agency misunderstanding the Native American culture and traditions – Participant 8 and the agency for which they worked did not agree on the importance of using tobacco in dealings with the Native American community not only in recruitment but in other aspects of relationship building as well.

Participant 2 mentioned that in spite of a growing relationship between the Native community and the agency represented, agencies don't "... know a whole lot about the inner workings of [Native Americans'] culture and community." In situations that call for finesse, the question "How do I do this?" is asked in order to be culturally sensitive. In other cases, as revealed by Participant 7, it has been noticed that "some agencies are very ignorant to the fact of being culturally sensitive to the Native American communities" and "don't really know what it takes to actually support and be an advocate to the - for the child and the home." Participant 8 recognized that there are people and agencies that are "unaware of

anything, basically, dealing with the [Native American] community that they are trying to recruit from.”

### Absence of Connection to the Community

Eighty percent of the participants claimed Native American ancestry, but only half of the participants were actively involved in the Native American communities during their personal time and spoke of strong connections to the people within the communities. Participants who identified themselves as being non-Native and/or those who indicated that they did not actively participate in the Native American community’s events on a personal level expressed difficulty in establishing connections with the Native American communities. These participants were evenly split between the FFAs and county child welfare agencies. Participants reported that the lack of connections within the communities worked against them in two ways. First, it prevented them from being able to “... identify who would want to be a Native American foster home...,” as Participant 2 stated, and second, it prevented them from being able to establish relationships with trusted Native American representatives who might be able to assist them with this task. Participant 5 stated that “...one of the barriers is that we don’t have someone that’s of Native American heritage that can really be our champion to help us find those families.” Participant 5 recognized that the Native Americans are a “close knit community” and without establishing connections and finding trusted members of the community who

believe in foster care and its necessity, it will continue to be difficult to recruit Native American foster homes.

One of the participants who identified themselves as Native American, who was active in the community, and who was exceedingly familiar with the challenges of recruitment shared an encounter witnessed between recruiters of non-Native background and the community at a local powwow. It was clear to this participant that the recruiters were not connecting with the Native American people who approached their information booth. As Participant 8 recalled the exchange between the recruiters and the community, “There’s no soul in either of their conversations...” and “That doesn’t work with the Native community.” The participant conveyed that the lack of knowledge, awareness, and connection to the community contributed to a generic exchange of giveaway items rather than a meaningful conversation about their purpose, to recruit those they encountered.

Several participants realized the potential impact of having Native Americans recruit and assist families with the process. Participant 2 mentioned that there is a “need to be looking at [the agency’s] mentor services and making sure that [the agency] had someone who was Native American, who could work with [potential and new Native American foster families] culturally and be respectful.” Along the same lines, Participant 1 asserted that “[we] need to have Indians recruiting Indian foster homes.” Participant 7 suggested, “Outreach should also be done in conjunction with Native Americans who are foster parents



who have gone through the process. Or even youth who were the product of that would be able to help recruit additional people because you've walked in those shoes." Participant 8 stressed that what would work for recruitment, what is needed "... are faces that are going to be accepted. They're going to look Indian. They're going to be Indian." The interview participants suggest the lack of connections between those engaging in recruitment and the Native American community create a barrier in recruiting foster homes in this community.

#### Tribal Enrollment of Caregiver

Half of the participants identified not being tribally enrolled or lacking a connection to a tribe as a barrier to recruiting Native American foster homes. According to all five of these participants, at least one caregiver must be tribally enrolled in order for the home to be approved for an ICWA-eligible child placement. One participant reported that the closest their agency came to the recruitment of a Native American family was when a couple, one of whom identified as Native American, called in to inquire about being certified as a foster home to care for ICWA-eligible children. The couple was ultimately not certified and was referred elsewhere because neither were tribally enrolled. Participant 7 recalled a time where a family was denied in the approval process because the caregiver "wasn't officially from a tribe."

## Summary

This chapter reported on the demographics of the interview participants and the themes identified in the data. The study identifies the following barriers to the recruitment of Native American foster families: expense/lack of financial support, Resource Family Approval, understated deficiency and need, Native American recruitment not prioritized, bias and judgement, vulnerability and the value of privacy, distrust of government, lack of cultural awareness, absence of connection to the community, and tribal enrollment of caregiver. The 10 themes revealed to the researchers in the transcriptions were identified individually as each researcher utilized analytic and theoretical coding skills. These 10 themes represent the main barriers professionals encounter when attempting to recruit Native American foster homes within the urban areas of Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This chapter will explore the researchers' interpretation of the results, practice implications for recruitment in regard to each of the barriers identified, as well as the relationship between the study findings and the existing literature related to the recruitment of Native American foster homes in urban areas. The study's limitations are discussed and recommendations for social work practice and research are included.

#### Expense/Lack of Financial Support

During the review of the transcripts, it was noticed by both researchers that every participant who mentioned expense as a barrier also referred to the lack of financial support at the agency level as a contributing factor. Many of the participants recognized that expense was relevant across ethnicities and cultures and saw the lack of financial support as directly relating to the support of recruitment efforts in the urban Indian communities.

The expenses, both expected and unexpected, accumulated by the individuals and families who foster children are ever-increasing. The income requirements, the cost to complete home and vehicle repairs and upgrades, the financial burden of paying for required trainings, and the time taken off work to complete these trainings, as well as out-of-pocket medical expenses, were all

identified as financial barriers. In order to prepare potential foster care providers for the costs they may have to face, the minimum level of income required has increased. This has restricted the number of people who can qualify to become certified foster parents. This barrier is consistent with the findings of Colton and colleagues (2006), who suggest that the inconsistency in the cost to be a foster parent and the amount of money one receives is a barrier to recruiting foster homes in general.

In addition to the expense on families, participants suggested that there is a lack of funding to support recruitment efforts within the agencies they represent. The majority of participants indicated that their agency does not have funding allocated to support recruitment efforts in the Native American community or to employ staff dedicated to this task. While the literature review did not turn up evidence of this, it is generally understood that in order for any organization to be effective in a task, the task must be assigned a level of importance and accompanied by the financial backing that it is consistent with.

### Practice Implications

To address the expense placed on families, creative ways to minimize the time demanded of the caregivers may alleviate some of this burden and make fostering a viable option for those who do not have the income required. Offering flexible times and locations convenient for individuals to complete foster home certification requirements and online training options may minimize the time caregivers must be absent from work. Participant 4 suggested that the provision

of financial support by social service agencies during the recruitment process could minimize the denial of potential foster families who are unable to cover the expense of required safety or structural upgrades to the homes. In addition, Participant 4 suggested that the community might be able to work with the social service agencies and FFAs to help potential foster families get their vehicle(s) serviced and home improvements done at a discounted price to reduce the number of families denied for these reasons.

The ICWA was enacted decades ago to ensure Indian children are maintained in their families and cultures yet there seems to be minimal financial support allocated to aid efforts specific to recruitment. It is apparent from this study that funding for recruitment is insufficient in the agencies represented; not knowing the budget of the individual agencies, it is unclear whether a reorganization of funds could correct this issue or if more support must be obtained from either the government or the community. What is certain, is that without additional funding, the social service agencies which support recruitment of Native American foster homes will continue to struggle to find homes.

#### Resource Family Approval

Policy accounts for the licensing rigidity that prevents a number of not only Native American families, but families of all ethnicities from making it through the approval process. Native American families' values, beliefs, lifestyles and traditions are asked to be set aside so that the families can help the government provide what has been deemed proper placement options for Native American

foster children. Often, it is found that the policies of RFA are too strict to account for the needs and abilities of a multicultural nation. The primary issue with RFA was noted to be space; restrictions on room assignments and sleeping arrangements are not culturally sensitive. Many families, again not just Native Americans specifically, share sleeping spaces for a number of reasons including financial limitations, housing options, and cultural norms. In addition to sleeping arrangements, requirements related to criminal background checks, transportation, infestation, structural integrity, and devices designed for safety all contribute to the failure to recruit foster homes across the board. It is clear that the RFA process is cumbersome and creates a barrier to recruitment in any community. RFA being a new policy, it was not identified in any of the literature reviewed.

### Practice Implications

The RFA process is one of the barriers that cannot be changed without reconsidering policy. Staff performing recruitment tasks can, however, make themselves aware of the challenges in approving foster homes and the cultural factors related when it comes to RFA. Recruiters should give special consideration to these factors and seek allowances when appropriate. For Native American homes, some exceptions can be made by contacting the child's tribe and engaging them in the process of RFA approval.

### Understated Deficiency and Need

Data revealed that there is likely a gross misconception by both the Native American community and child welfare agencies that the number of Native American children in foster care is insignificant and therefore the need for Native American foster homes is minimal or non-existent. A small quantity of the participants admitted that they themselves were ill-informed about the quantity of Native American children in care and were misled about the priority of placing a Native American child in a Native American home.

Recognizing that, while the numbers may be small, AI/AN children are disproportionately represented in out-of-home care is crucial. Also agreed upon by the participants, is the belief that the Native American community is unaware of the need for Native American foster homes. This understated deficiency and need is a key barrier in the recruitment of Native American foster homes and is not revealed in any literature thus far.

### Practice Implications

Efforts to recruit Native American foster homes and attempts at qualifying to become a foster home are occurring, but on a much smaller scale than what is called for. Agency staff and the community must be informed of the disproportionality of Native American children in out-of-home care and of the need for appropriate foster home placements in order to garner more interest. Without the knowledge that there is a dire need for Native American foster

homes, no progress can be made towards the recruitment of suitable homes for these children.

### Native American Recruitment Not Prioritized

Recruitment is a standard task that is not often tailored to the type of homes needed within a specific community. Only three of the six agencies engaging in recruitment efforts indicated that they prioritized recruitment of Native American foster homes while the other three indicated that they generally cast a wide net in order to catch a large number of individuals and families. It is noted that the agencies who cast a wide net recognized that they could and should improve their efforts to make Native American recruitment a priority. Most of the participants in this study who do engage in the recruitment of Native American foster care providers do so outside of their job scope - this indicates a lack of prioritization on the part of the agency. Even with a clear need for homes and the ICWA in place, it seems minimal efforts are being made to prioritize recruitment in this community. Consistent with the literature review, Rehnquist noted the system's seemingly limited interest in expanding recruitment efforts (2002).

### Practice Implications

The prioritization of Native American foster home recruitment can be addressed by reevaluating job descriptions within FFAs and child welfare agencies and assigning specific staff members to this task. In addition, pursuing a variety of recruitment opportunities within the Native American community



could improve the agencies' results in identifying potential foster care providers from that community.

### Bias and Judgment

Bias and judgement are common themes that persist in American society. As indicated in the data, bias and judgement of the Native American community is rooted in a lack of cultural awareness and understanding. Furthermore, the American history is riddled with unfavorable views of Indian people. The literature review did not indicate this, however, more than half of the individuals interviewed witnessed bias and judgment playing a significant role in the lack of Native American foster homes in urban areas.

Some judgements are healthy and necessary for social workers to have and pay attention to. The position they are in commands a high level of responsibility and caution. In a relatively short amount of time, they must presume to know the individual or family applying to become foster care provider(s) and commit to the belief that they are safe and capable of taking in foster children. Even when professionals are trained to put aside their personal biases and operate from a place of empathy and competence, their decisions may be impacted by the stereotypes they grew up hearing and/or believing. These biases and judgements may influence whether a potential foster family passes their home inspection, whether their past mistakes disqualify them, and whether they are psychologically sound enough to harbor and provide care for foster children. While the literature review did not recognize the influence that

bias and judgment has had on the interactions between those recruiting and potential foster care providers, it did report on the many negative experiences those who were able to become foster parents had with the child welfare system (Halverson et al., 2002).

### Practice Implications

Due to this being a vital component of the job, it would benefit both the social worker and the potential foster families if recruitment was performed with cultural humility and respect. If possible, the person evaluating prospective families should share or have an understanding of the individual or family's background, values, and culture. In regard to working with Native American people, agencies must take responsibility for ensuring staff are properly informed of history and culture in order to mitigate any bias they may hold. Should the recruiter come across something unfamiliar to them, the prudent course of action would include further investigation and possible collaboration with the child's tribe before the applicant was approved or denied. The number of Native American foster families achieving certification may increase as a result of recruitment staff acknowledging and addressing any bias and judgements they may have.

### Vulnerability and the Value of Privacy

Another theme that came up in the research is the distaste for feeling vulnerable and a high value placed on personal and family privacy in the Native American community. The nature of the job seems to require the person evaluating potential foster care providers to have a comprehensive knowledge of

the applicant and all details of their life. Personal questions must be asked in order to ascertain whether the individual or family will be a suitable placement for children who have already been victimized. As indicated in the data, Native American people are hesitant to share the most intimate details of their lives especially with someone who is not a part of or has no understanding of their culture or community. However, conducting these intrusive evaluations is by no means a guarantee that the family will not harm a child placed in its care and the question begs to be asked, is there a better way? Rehnquist (2002) noted that the public child welfare system is stubborn in its decision to maintain current recruitment strategies even in light of their detriment.

### Practice Implications

Understanding that the intrusive and intimate questions asked during the approval process to become a certified foster care provider are standard and mandated, special attention to the way questions are presented must be paid. Those who are conducting the assessment should be aware that sharing intimate details of one's life creates vulnerability for anyone, not just Native American people. Asking questions in a culturally sensitive manner is imperative. And finally, when possible, agencies should take steps to employ staff who have personal and professional experience in working with Native American communities.

## Distrust of Government

There is an undeniable distrust in government entities by the Native American community rooted in a history of ill-intended policy and negative experiences with government organizations. Historical trauma is a major factor that continues to contribute to a distrust by Native American people in government officials and agencies. There were centuries of policies supported in the literature that make Native American people leery of engaging with most social service agencies. Furthermore, policies that specifically intended to remove Indian children from their homes and assimilate them into the general society make Native American people especially resistant to engaging with and trusting representatives from the child welfare system; recruiters for Native American foster homes fall into this category.

In addition to the historical factors, personal or familial negative experience with government systems contributes to the lack of trust in these entities by Native American people. This is consistent with Rehnquist's (2002) findings that poor public perception contributes to barriers in foster care recruitment in general.

This distrust in government entities impedes the recruitment process in Native American communities by limiting the connections recruiters can make and limiting the opportunities the recruiters have to engage with people of the community. Native American people may show resistance to being open and honest in the RFA process and even a resistance to agreeing to the process all

together. The lack of trust is a key barrier to recruitment and will require effort on the part of more than one government agency in order to be resolved.

### Practice Implications

In order to build rapport and cultivate trust, the reality of historical trauma and its consequences must be acknowledged. Those trying to recruit from the Native American communities must tread lightly and conduct themselves with utmost respect. Moreover, increasing awareness and gaining an understanding of historical trauma may better prepare social workers for when and how they address people in the Native American communities. Halverson and colleagues' (2002) findings reported that a lack of acknowledgement of historical pain related to centuries of atrocities contributes to a lack of trust in government entities. It is not enough for staff of these agencies to be aware of the effects of historical trauma, they must acknowledge it in their interactions with Native American people. The social workers from both FFAs and county child welfare agencies must be prepared to overcome the negative stigma of their association with the government. It is likely to take several generations of increasingly ethical conduct before Native American people can begin to trust fully. Until then, the recruitment barrier of government distrust is left to the social workers to address with their professional skills.

### Lack of Cultural Awareness

While the education required of most professionals in the field of public child welfare is extensive and oftentimes ongoing, there continues to be a lack of

understanding between people of different cultures and backgrounds. The results of this data revealed that there continues to be a significant gap in understanding the culture of Native American people by these professionals and that this gap creates a barrier to recruitment. Many agencies and their staff are unaware of common cultural practices and norms that, if utilized, could facilitate a connection to the community. Hosting recruitment events with culturally relevant food or offering tobacco as a sign of respect were among the list of culturally relevant practices that recruitment agencies failed to recognize. These findings are consistent with Halverson and colleagues' (2002) study that found child welfare social service practitioners' lack of understanding of culturally relevant practices and services contributes to the unsuccessful recruitment of foster homes.

#### Practice Implications

Professionals in the social services field are taught to express cultural humility and many seek out resources for assistance in navigating unfamiliar situations. Increasing the frequency of this practice may improve communication and connection between the two groups of people. In addition to expecting that recruiters practice cultural humility, again, some responsibility must lie on the agency to ensure that staff are familiar with cultural values, norms, and practices of Native American people either through personal or professional experience. Utilizing Native American people from the community the agency intends to recruit may mitigate the barrier of a lack of awareness of culture.

### Absence of Connection to the Community

The data clearly indicated that there is a disconnection between many of the people and entities recruiting Native American foster homes and the Native American people of those communities. Those who identified as non-Native American appeared to recognize that this lack of connection contributed to less than successful recruitment outcomes. Native American and non-Native American persons recruiting on behalf of the organizations often have a presence at community and cultural events, advertise within their immediate areas, and provide a variety of services for their target populations, yet still lack a vital connection to the communities they are trying to recruit from.

In order to create and cultivate connections, each social service organization should consist of staff with cultures and backgrounds representative of the people within their community. Participants in this research suggested that utilizing Native American people to participate in recruitment efforts would increase the likelihood of having an organic connection but cautioned that it was not guaranteed. A staff member of one ethnicity may not be able to recruit a family of a similar ethnicity, but in many ways that similarity helps to establish the foundation for a productive relationship. Data in the literature review related to this topic did not specifically identify a lack of connection as a barrier to recruitment but did support that a failure to capitalize on existing connections contributes to unsuccessful recruitment (Rehnquist, 2002).

### Practice Implications

In order to make a significant impact on the families within a community, connections must be sought out and nourished in each segment of the population. Unfortunately, the child welfare system is not preceded by a positive reputation. This means that staff from child welfare agencies must find or manufacture ways to meet the people of their communities on a more personal level and work harder to build relationships with trusted members of each segment. Being accepted in the communities they serve will allow the social service organizations to recruit more effectively. Regardless of their cultural background, these connections are necessary, but it appears more likely that the recruitment of viable Native American foster homes will come directly from, or with assistance of, the Native American community itself; perhaps, from Native American foster families themselves, past and present. Both the literature review and interview results indicate that the use of current foster parents in the recruitment of new foster parents is an idea worth promotion (Rehnquist, 2002). The value an experienced foster care provider holds for children in the system and potential foster care providers should not be underestimated.

### Tribal Enrollment of Caregiver

Tribal enrollment and connections were not recognized as barriers in the literature review, however, it was a theme revealed in this research. Half of participants interviewed indicated that at least one of the caregivers must be tribally enrolled in order to qualify as a potential foster care provider for an ICWA-



eligible child. It is not enough for potential caregivers to have tribal connections, to identify as Native American, or to practice Native American culture and tradition; if they are not tribally enrolled, they do not fit the ICWA requirements of placement preference. In urban areas, the number of tribally enrolled Native American people has been declining over the years due to children being born to one Native American parent and one non-Native American parent (Schmidt, 2011). Each of the more than 560 tribes across the United States have their own tribal enrollment criteria and with the intermixing of ethnicities, many Native American people are falling short of meeting this criterion (Schmidt, 2011). This limits the pool of Native American people who are eligible to meet placement criteria as a Native American foster home.

#### Practice Implications

While the requirement of tribal enrollment for potential Native American foster care providers was identified as a theme in the data, the researchers were unable to confirm this requirement in any documented literature. If this requirement has been adopted by agencies in the absence of policy, it may be a simple misunderstanding of the requirements to care for an Indian child. If this is, in fact, law or policy at the federal, state, or agency level that the researchers were unable to find, then the tribal enrollment barrier is one that cannot be changed without reconsidering policy on the federal and tribal level. Recruiters can be both mindful of this barrier and proactive in their efforts to determine whether potential foster care providers meet the criterion. With the origin of this

requirement unclear, it may behoove agencies to look deeper at their agency policies or other policies they are referring to when considering tribal enrollment as a criterion for potential foster families.

### Literature Review Comparison

The literature review addressed a different set of questions than those presented by this study. Still, several challenges and issues were explored in regard to the recruitment of foster homes. The consistencies and inconsistencies shared between each theme and the literature reviewed were mentioned as the themes were examined. In addition, there were several themes in both the literature review and the results that were not identified by the other.

Contrary to what was found in reviewing similar literature, the results did not give the researchers any reason to believe that recruitment efforts were thwarted by the increasing demands of children entering foster care as was suggested by Colton and colleagues (2006). Additionally, the results from the study did not indicate that potential foster parents were denied certification due to their inability to acquire the necessary skills to perform the job, a challenge of recruitment identified in a cross-cultural analysis completed by Colton and colleagues in 2006. Appropriate training was also not a barrier named by the participants in this study, but one that Colton and colleagues (2006) found to be a key factor in an individual or family's decision to provide foster care for a child. Similarly, Rehnquist mentioned that the inability to measure recruitment success was an issue when considering how to improve the recruitment of foster care

providers. None of the participants in this study indicated that recruitment of Native American foster care providers was at a level which someone could easily lose track of.

Themes identified in this study that were not previously acknowledged in the literature review include: Resource Family Approval, understated deficiency and need, bias and judgment, vulnerability and the value of privacy, distrust of government, absence of connection to the community, and tribal enrollment of caregiver. These themes are unique to Native Americans in the ways explained in the sections above.

#### Limitations of Study

The researchers were able to identify several limitations of this study as they collected and assembled the data. To begin with, the perspective gathered for this study included only that of professionals in the field. Choosing this perspective provided a one-sided view of the barriers to recruitment and left a host of questions unaddressed. Additional studies may wish to focus on the perceptions of individuals who have attempted or are currently attempting to become certified foster care providers within their communities.

Similarly, the study focused on the barriers to recruit Native American foster homes in urban areas, but only two urban areas, both within the state of California, were explored. The relocation of Native Americans to urban areas occurred across the United States and neither the Los Angeles County nor the San Francisco Bay Area can be said to be representative of the other urban

locations within this country. Policy review may benefit from additional research which compares and contrasts the findings of this study with future studies on the recruitment of Native American foster homes in other urban Indian communities across the country.

Another limitation of this study may be in the answers received to the interview questions. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions posed, the participants may have felt inclined to provide the researchers with socially desirable answers. The original concern was that the participants would not feel secure in the confidentiality agreement and withhold the complete truth. While this may still be a possibility, the value and amount of content gained from each interview suggests otherwise. In order to combat this possibility in future research, self-administered surveys may be conducted.

The study was able to gain the cooperation and participation from 10 different people with experience in the recruitment of Native American foster homes within the urban areas specified. This met the goal of the study, but additional participants may have led to the identification of more, or different themes. Moreover, the sample size would suggest that the findings may not be generalizable. The themes explored in this paper were chosen based on the number of times they surfaced in the interviews as well as on the level of experience and knowledge of the participants who brought them to the researchers' attention. Some themes were not included in the results due to the fact that only one participant gave voice to them.

A final limitation of this paper rests in the novice level of the researchers who performed the research. During the interviews, the researchers were prone to ask leading questions and may have encouraged the participants with nods, facial expressions, or hand gestures. Providing materials for participants to self-administer surveys in the future may help to eliminate the researchers' presence from the results.

### Research Implications

This study produced more data than was applicable to the questions posed within the interview guide. Information is available to those who seek it and the professionals in the field have more than proved that they are willing to contribute to research if it means a chance to improve the lives of the children they serve. Further research may delve into the community's perspective on the barriers to qualifying as a foster care provider. The foster care providers' perspective on the recruitment process and a comparison study of individual cases within similar communities would be another direction to take this research. These questions must be asked of the people with direct experience with the public child welfare system. Only then can the answers be trusted to guide policy and practice.

### Summary

The recruitment of viable foster care providers is a challenging task. The 10 themes identified in this research provide a glimpse of the barriers

professionals face when recruiting Native American individuals and families.

Many of the themes are familiar and could easily apply to non-Native American cultures, but it must be recognized that these 10 themes disproportionately affect Native American families in urban Indian communities. Those responsible for recruitment must pay special attention to these barriers and adjust their efforts accordingly. Until steps are taken to address this imbalance, the situation does not stand much chance for improvement.

APPENDIX A  
LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino  
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
APPROVED 1/16/2018 VOID AFTER 1/15/2019  
IRB# SW1803 CHAIR Jan 16

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
*School of Social Work*

### INFORMED CONSENT

The study you are being asked to participate in is being conducted by Shirley Mae Begay and Jennifer Lynn Wilczynski, MSW students under the supervision of Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog Ph.D., MPA, an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-Committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to identify the barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes in urban areas, specifically those in Los Angeles County and the nine counties comprising the metropolitan San Francisco Bay area.

**DESCRIPTION:** The researchers are requesting no more than an hour of your time to gather information on your experiences recruiting Native American foster homes. You will be asked questions on your connections to and knowledge of Native American communities and current recruitment practices within your agency. Additionally, you will be asked about the barriers that you have encountered and any ideas or suggestions you have. Should the interview require additional time, it will be with your permission that we schedule another time and date to meet.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation is voluntary - you may decline to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with and you may end the interview at any time. If you decide to accept both the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research, your mark and the date of the interview will be requested on this Letter of Informed Consent and a copy provided to you. Should you decide to end the interview, your responses will not be used in the research project and will be shredded at the first opportunity. Your relationship with the researchers will not be affected by your choice to discontinue with participation.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses to the questions in this interview will remain anonymous. The notes will be kept in the homes of the researchers. Information that appears in the final report will not be directly connected to the individuals who provided the data. Reasonable efforts will be made to conceal any

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personal information in the final draft of the research paper. Upon the termination of the research, all written data will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted. As mandated reporters, the researchers will be obligated to report any indications you may give of self-harm or intended harm to another person to the appropriate agency.

**DURATION:** It will take approximately 60 minutes to complete the interview.

**RISKS:** There may be minimal risks to participating in this study. It is possible that concerns of anonymity may arise. Participants will be assigned an identification number in order to protect anonymity. The type and service area of the employment agency will be used; however, the names of the agencies will be kept anonymous.

**BENEFITS:** There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. The results of this research have the potential to guide future policies and improve recruitment of Native American foster homes.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact our research advisor, Deirdre Lanesskog Ph.D., MPA at (909) 537-5501 ext. 77222. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, please feel free to call the Office of Student Research, California State University, San Bernardino, at (909) 537-5000.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) at California State University, San Bernardino after December 2018.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place a mark here \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

I agree to be tape recorded: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

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APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following interview guide was created by the researchers, Shirley M. Begay and Jennifer L. Wilczynski.

### Demographics

I would like to begin the interview by asking a few background questions:

1. Please tell me your ethnicity.
2. Please tell me how you identify your gender.
3. How old are you?
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
5. What is the type of the agency you work for and what geographic area do you service?
6. What is your title and how long you have been in this position?
7. How long have you worked with Native American people other than in this role?

### Connection to and Knowledge of Native American Communities

Now I would like to ask you some questions that will help me better understand your knowledge regarding Native American Communities.

8. Tell me about connections you have to the Native American community.
9. Please tell me about your knowledge of the Native American community in the areas you serve.

Probe: History?

Issues the Native American community face?

Needs?

Services?

### Current Recruitment Practices

The next set of questions will be on your understanding of how Native American foster homes are currently recruited.

10. What services does your agency provide?
11. What specific things does your agency do to recruit Native American foster homes?

Probe: Tell me about a time you successfully recruited a Native American family and they became certified to be a foster care provider. What did you do and how did that happen?

12. What is your overall role at your job, including all duties you are responsible for?
13. Tell me about the specific duties of your role that are related to recruiting Native American foster homes.

### Barriers to Recruitment

The following questions will help clarify your perceptions and experiences regarding barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes

14. What are some of the challenges you come up against when recruiting Native American foster homes?
15. Tell me about challenges you face working with Native American people.
16. Are there any other barriers to recruiting Native American foster homes you can tell me about?

17. What do you believe are the reasons there are so few Native American foster homes in urban areas?

#### Reasons Native American Families May Be Denied for Foster Home Certification

The next set of questions will help explain why Native American families might be denied during consideration of foster home certification.

18. What are the reasons you have seen for Native American families being denied in the foster care process?
19. What are the challenges Native American people face that others do not when wanting to become foster care providers?

#### Ideas for Improvement of Recruitment

The final question I have for you is on your personal ideas for improving the recruitment situation.

20. What do you think needs to be done to increase the number of Native American foster homes in urban areas?

#### Additional Comments

If you would like to address anything the previous questions did not, you may do so now.

21. Do you have any additional comments or is there any other information you would like to provide?

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. Shirley Begay and Jennifer Wilczynski collaborated on the following sections:

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusion

Both Shirley Begay and Jennifer Wilczynski contributed to the formatting, editing and revisions process throughout the preparation of this paper for submission.